

...that Turkmenistan is the most closed of the post-Soviet countries?

Since 2007, Turkmenistan has been led by President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov. The country's first president who died in 2006, Saparmurat Niyazov, oversaw one of the world's most repressive and isolated states. Virtually no independent public activity was allowed, and a 2003 religion law banned most religious activity. The 2003 religion law, which violates international standards on freedom of religion or belief, continues to be enforced. It sets intrusive registration criteria; bans any activity by unregistered religious organizations; requires that the government be informed of all foreign financial support; forbids worship in private homes; and places severe and discriminatory restrictions on religious education.

Berdimuhamedov continues to maintain a state structure of control and repression. For instance, a system of categorical denials of international travel for many citizens remains in place; the internet is blocked and a dissident website based in Vienna was hacked; and as of 2013, the Turkmen government no longer recognizes dual citizenship. In addition, according to the International Crisis Group, Turkmenistan has one of the world's highest prisoner-to-population ratios, and a 2011 report on Turkmenistan by the UN Committee against Torture (CAT) concludes that torture is widespread and occurs with impunity.

USCIRF Commissioners and staff met with President Berdimuhamedov in 2007 and raised concerns about the poor religious freedom climate. While President Berdimuhamedov ordered a few limited reforms and released the former chief mufti from prison in connection to USCIRF's

visit, his government has not adopted systemic legal reforms on freedom of religion or belief and other human rights.

For more information about Turkmenistan, please go [here](#) .